



The dramatic entrance into the exhibition "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs" at LACMA.
Opposite: A gold pectoral inlaid with precious stones that spell out the name of the king, on view in the exhibition.

This page: Kenneth Garrett, "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," Official Companion Book, © 2005 National Geographic Society.
Opposite: Padgett and Company, Jamie Padgett, Chicago.



Marketing the King:

Tut 2 and the New Blockbuster

By Julia Beizer, Susan Breitkopf, and Amanda Litvinov

What would make more than 5,000 otherwise normal Los Angelenos spend a good part of a spectacularly sunny day descending into a tomb? And shell out \$30 for the privilege while waiting in line as much as an hour? The short answer is Tut. The boy king of ancient Egypt, star of the still-unsurpassed blockbuster show from the late 1970s, has returned from the Land of the Dead and begun a new nationwide, four-city tour. "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," a kind of Tut sequel, debuted at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in June and runs through November before heading east to Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Crowds have been large and enthusiastic, ticket sales brisk, and media coverage widespread and mostly positive. That much at least has remained unchanged from the original "Treasures of Tutankhamun," which opened in 1976, now considered the museum field's first true blockbuster exhibit. But in the quarter century between the Tuts, much has changed. This time the boy king's arrival in the United States, at an estimated cost of more than \$50 million, required four museums—LACMA; the Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale; the Field Museum in Chicago; and Philadelphia's Franklin Institute—to enter into an unprecedented partnership with a foreign government—Egypt's—and a consortium of powerful commercial firms whose interests might be less about scholarly integrity and more about money. Which leads to the question: To what degree has money become the priority for the four museums hosting Tut this time around?

Money did not seem to be the major concern of the crowd that entered LACMA one day last August, even those who elected to pay a special no-waiting entry fee of \$75. They filed through a wide corridor lined with soaring columns emblazoned with Egyptian hieroglyphs, eerily lit from below. The only sounds were the shuffle of feet, the hum of wheelchairs and strollers, and the excited whispers of

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This inlaid royal diadem was found on the mummified Boy King's head.

tians who lived before Tutankhamun and more than 50 artifacts from the boy king's tomb. Only 12 of these were on display in the first tour. Like Thomas, David Silverman, an Egyptologist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and curator of the exhibit's U.S. tour, was impressed with the objects in Basel. But he also wanted them to be "integrated in the kind of framework that [works] in the United States."

There was a problem, however, and it was spelled "money." To bring the exhibit to the U.S., the museums would have to pay the Egyptian government \$20 million plus a portion of ticket sales—an extraordinary ante that raised the stakes well beyond what is customary in the museum field. It wasn't feasible for museums to put so much cash up front. The solution: corporate partners.

Spurred by the Basel show, the exhibit marketing firm Arts and Exhibits International (AEI) teamed up with National Geographic, the world-famous Washington, D.C.-based publishing and media company. They sent a proposal for a new international tour of Tut's treasures to Hawass, a National Geographic "explorer in residence," who held the key to letting the artifacts travel. Concert promoter AEG Live, known for American Idol and Bon Jovi concerts, was enlisted to provide capital and marketing expertise. Things were beginning to take shape.

"There was no way National Geographic would be able to provide the loan fees," said Terry Garcia, the firm's executive vice president. "We developed a three-party partnership—National Geographic, AEI, and AEG. We were able to put together a package that the Egyptians were happy with." It was AEI that finally came up with the \$20 million.

AEI is no stranger to the blockbuster. At the time of the negotiations, the company was circulating "Diana—A Celebration," about the life and work of the late Diana, princess of Wales. AEI founder John Norman is a former co-president of Clear Channel Exhibitions, a division of Clear Channel Communications, which owns and operates more than 1,200 U.S. radio stations. Norman earned his stripes creating such extravaganzas as David Copperfield shows, tours of Jesus Christ Superstar, and Janet Jackson's "Velvet Rope" tour. His business partner Andres Numhauser is also a veteran of Clear Channel Exhibitions.

For-profit companies usually enter deals for the obvious reason: to make money. But what about a country's motive? In this case, money may also have been a factor. According to the *New York Times*, the 27-month tour is expected to yield about \$35 million for Egypt. The money is slated for the preservation of Egypt's national treasures, part of the government's multi-pronged campaign to raise \$550 million for the Grand Museum of Egypt on the Giza plains. The museum, expected to house at least 100,000 objects, was sanctioned by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1992 but has been stymied by bureaucracy and a lack of funding.

Speaking to the *New York Times*, Hawass did not bother to put too fine a spin on it. "I am not going to send any exhibit for free anymore," he said, referring to the '70s blockbuster. "We took you for a free lunch and dinner a lot. Now is the time to pay for your dinner."

It was Hawass who tapped David Silverman to curate the

the crowd. Museum staff ushered visitors into a small theater. The lights, already dim, got dimmer. "It feels like a haunted house," said one visitor as she looked up at the vaulted screen. A 90-second film clip narrated by Egyptian actor Omar Sharif showed sweeping vistas of the Egyptian landscape, along with detailed shots of the intricate carvings visitors can see on the pieces that awaited just rooms away. Having spanned centuries of Egyptian history and lore in a minute and a half, the movie ended with Sharif's grand welcome to Tutankhamun's treasures, with a final shot of a small wooden bust that showed exactly how young the boy king looked when he ruled Egypt.

The screen went dark. Immediately, dramatic lighting underneath it came on to reveal the real artifact, ancient and priceless, in a case just yards away. An audible gasp from the crowd and more shuffling of feet. The throng pushed forward to inspect the case, the murmur of Sharif's voice seeping from visitors' headsets.

Even the selection of the objects in this Tut exhibit involved an international cast. Artifacts were chosen by curators from the Museum of Ancient Art in Basel, Switzerland, with a nod from Egypt's Secretary General for the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Zahi Hawass. These objects were on view from April to October 2004 in Basel and then from November 2004 and May 2005 at the Kunst und Ausstellungshalle (Art and Exhibition Hall) in Bonn, Germany.

Described by Nancy Thomas, LACMA's deputy director, art administration and collections, as "first-rate," the Basel exhibit included 70 objects from the tombs of rulers and well-to-do Egyp-

show. Silverman had written the text panels and labels for the 1976 exhibit and coordinated its showing at the Field Museum. McMillan Group was chosen to design the exhibit and AEG Live would write the checks. Northern Trust of California, a wealth management firm, would also contribute financial muscle but as a national sponsor, not a partner.

Because of the popularity of the subject and the impact of Tut 1, many museums wanted the exhibit. Only four made the cut, largely because of their longstanding ties to Egypt. Curators from the Field Museum had worked in Egypt and known Hawass for a long time. "There's been a personal relationship with him and people here," said John McCarter, the museum's president. Hawass has lectured at LACMA and taught at UCLA. The Franklin Institute in Philadelphia has a working relationship with the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, where Silverman hangs his hat.

The Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, does not have an Egyptology department, but Irvin Lippman, executive director, had worked with AEI's Norman in the past, most recently on the Princess Diana show. "I was very excited when I got a call from John Norman," he said. "A lot of [the reason the exhibition is coming to Fort Lauderdale] has to do with relationships but also [the museum's] location. That has a great deal to do with why it's coming here."

Museums were the driving force behind the original Tut show, which toured for three years and became the nation's most popular museum exhibition ever. Stuart Silver, then director of design at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, describes a distinct "spirit of cooperation" between the collaborating museums and particularly between Thomas Hoving, former director of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the late J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. There was extensive support and negotiation between the U.S. and Egyptian governments to bring the 50-plus

objects from Tut's tomb to tour the seven American cities, said Silver. But there were no private interests involved. The first Tut also appeared at the Field Museum and the University of Chicago, New Orleans Museum of Art, LACMA, Seattle Art Museum, and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco.

"We at the Metropolitan knew it was going to be big," Silver said. "But I don't think any of us knew that it was going to be a monster." More than 1.2 million people saw "Treasures" at the Metropolitan Museum during the exhibit's 17-week run—a truly monster success story that to some critics created the "blockbuster era."

In the quarter century since Tut last toured the United States, government funding for museum exhibitions has been harder to come by, and competition for private donors is fiercer than ever. The curators involved in "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs" believe that partnerships with for-profit companies are the only way to bring such one-of-a-kind objects to the United States.

"We knew that we would be criticized in the press," said LACMA's Thomas. "And we'd have to be pretty stupid not to understand that there's great concern about the commercial aspects, the partnerships, the production, the whole purpose for doing this show. But I can clearly state that LACMA's purpose was to bring these materials to an audience on the West Coast of the United States." Had the museum not participated, she adds, no other institution in the region would have stepped in.

A young Egyptologist now working at Stanford University, Kathlyn Cooney, co-curated LACMA's version of the show with Thomas. She watched the process with strict attention, knowing these delicate partnerships are in her future if she ever wants to bring other expensive-to-insure objects to the United States.

"Given cuts in public funding, every museum is having to look for alternative sources of funding," Cooney said. "Dealing with cor-



A gallery with objects from Tut's tomb organized by his roles as head of state, chief priest, and commander-in-chief.



Clockwise from top left: Tut's grandmother's golden coffin. A wooden torso that is believed to most resemble Tutankhamun. Tut's clothing chest. The theater where the exhibition's introductory film is shown. This gallery displays everyday objects from Tut's tomb. This striking coffinette held the king's viscera: liver, lungs, stomach, or intestines.



Images #2 and 6: Kenneth Garrett, "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," Official Companion Book, © 2005 National Geographic Society. Other images: Padgett and Company, Jamie Padgett, Chicago.

porations is part of that brave new world. It's been a dialogue that we've been having at this museum and at other institutions around the country: How do you make this deal with a corporation work in the museum's best interest, in the public's best interest, and also let the corporation get something out of it so that they'll continue to support exhibitions in the future in a responsible way?"

Not surprisingly, Tom Miserendino, chief operating officer at AEG Live, sees corporate partnerships as an essential part of museum business. The concert and event promoter is handling the majority of marketing and promotion for all legs of the exhibition. From Miserendino's seat at the table, major exhibitions are costly and risky ventures that must enlist corporate partners to succeed.

"There's a role for us to play," he said. "Some of these major exhibits require so much money. It's probably not such a good use of a museum's resources. If the museum had a financial loss, they'd have to curtail other parts of their operations. This keeps them doing what they do best every day."

Although AEG Live produces 1,500 events around the country every year, this is its first museum show. Pulling off an exhibition is not all that different from a Neil Diamond, American Idol, or Justin Timberlake concert, said Miserendino. All venues have security needs, and there is always an eye on the visitor experience. "[A museum is] a more subdued environment," he noted. "Crowds aren't cheering, but you do have people oohing and aahing as they go through the exhibit."

And while corporate partnerships may give some museum professionals pause, Fort Lauderdale's Lippman embraces them. "In my mind, it's a win-win," he said. "Together we have mutual marketing goals."

"There's been a long precedent for for-profit exhibit groups having relationships with institutions throughout the country," he added. "I feel very passionate about this. There is a lot of hypocrisy about working with the private sector, [but] museums have been doing it for years."

Not everyone in his own field agrees. On the other side of the debate is James Cuno, president and director, Art Institute of Chicago. Though he hasn't singled out the Tut show, Cuno has been outspoken in his criticism of blockbusters and their effects on museums. Blockbusters "came to dominate the museum's activity," he told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, "and people's expectations of the museum."

And he has cautionary words for museums deciding to bring blockbusters to their cities. "When it comes to exhibits that are conceived for other reasons—drive attendance, increase public profile, increase revenue—those factors alone are not enough to justify an exhibition," he told *Museum News*.

Cuno worries in particular about corporate partners that are as intimately involved in exhibition planning as AEG Live has been. By "associating with a concert promoter, you risk [losing] some of that dignity," he said. "One does have to think about the associations one is keeping. At the end of the day, one has to decide whether the public perception of the institution has been advanced and is better than before the exhibit. Reputation is the greatest asset we have. It's what we capitalize on when we seek support."

One can consider Quint Gregory an expert on the subject of museum blockbusters. After all, the lecturer at the University of

Maryland teaches a course called *Attending the Blockbuster: Understanding the Impact of Temporary Exhibitions*. Like Cuno, he is wary of the museum-corporate partnership. "With Tut 2, it's [about] who is organizing the show," Gregory said. "In this case you have curators at LACMA having to work with a group whose founder [AEI's John Norman] worked for Clear Channel [Exhibitions]. That's troublesome because you've got a for-profit venture that's interested in entertainment determining to some extent the content of a major show. Corporate sponsorship, in all its forms, has certainly been around, but that's a little different than having responsibility for the organization of a show."

There's too much focus on the bottom line, Gregory said. "There's this demand for the maximization of profit when you have a Clear Channel-like group organizing it and you have the lending state, Egypt, [saying] we demand so much return. You have to ask whether they're as concerned about the educational content as the theatrical experience."

Gregory does not see the upside to corporate involvement. "The blockbuster runs away from serving the scholarly good in the name of being accessible in an easy, McDonald's-like way," he said. "It doesn't serve the common good. It actually does ill and injures our understanding of history and culture."

"Museums are by their nature designed to lose money," Gregory added. "Churches are not supposed to turn a profit and neither are schools. There are things in any society whose value cannot be measured in terms of dollars. So why is a corporate mindset taking hold in the museum world? This bottom-line focus to a certain extent squeezes out what I would argue is the natural purpose of museums. Tut 2 is a dangerous marker along this path."

As a key player in the first Tut show, Stuart Silver is no stranger to the blockbuster. But he does believe exhibitions are headed down a slippery slope. "It's a decline in spirit to have the kind of managerial overview from a private corporation or individual as opposed to making a purely museum collaboration," he said. "I'm sorry that that kind of commercial promotion is involved. It would have been impossible in the '60s and '70s to have that level of private participation in a museum exhibition. I don't know quite how we raised all that money," he added, referring to the original Tut show.

Large-scale shows can be "crass," noted Thomas Hoving in the *Los Angeles Times*. Hoving organized the 1976 event and is considered the "inventor" of the blockbuster. But, he added, "These blockbuster exhibits have brought real, rare and beautiful works of art to millions who otherwise wouldn't have seen them. . . . To those who think \$30 is too expensive to see incomparable works of precious ancient art, think of how much it would cost to take your family to Cairo for a long weekend."

The Tut gift shop at LACMA is bright, fun, and somewhat chaotic. On a late summer day, kids are begging their parents for Tut backpacks, trying on T-shirts, and playing with magnets and puzzles. Adults browse through the exhibit catalogues and linger over the jewelry. A \$2,400 replica of one of the signature pieces in the show, a mask from a gold and lapis coffinette, is available behind the counter.

A membership booth near the exhibition's entrance is mobbed



Left: The Egypt Before Tutankhamun gallery is meant to look like an archaeological dig, with desert lighting and colors and murals of the Nile and dunes. Below: This golden coffin, Tut's grandmother's, was the best preserved, even though at some point thieves broke into it.



with visitors stopping to pick up information. The museum has seen its membership increase, said LACMA curator Thomas: "Presumably, it's because people want to get a discounted ticket for Tut . . . but it will be really interesting to see . . . how much the membership really [responds to other exhibitions]."

Suddenly amid all this shop activity, something new dawns on one visitor. This isn't a museum pretending to be market-savvy and entrepreneurial. This is a museum actually succeeding at these things. While some professionals worry that museums, like many of their nonprofit, charitable institution brethren, are poorly equipped to sit down and negotiate with their profit-driven, corporate partners, the evidence suggests otherwise.

This is not a story of the lamb and the wolf. Rather, it may be a story of how the lamb has taken a few of the wolf's tactics and adapted them. Museums have learned marketing and learned it well.

How much of this is good news and how much is bad will be decided over time. But meanwhile, Fort Lauderdale's Museum of Art is already seeing its own Tut Effect. In September, two months before the Florida show opened, the museum was getting 100 new members a day. "We've grown our membership considerably," said director Irvin Lippman. "There's a whole new spotlight on the visual arts, and that can only serve us well. [By the end of the show] there will be no one in South Florida who doesn't know how to find the Museum of Art."

LACMA is studying how many people leave Tut and make their way over to its other galleries. The museum is offering a discounted admission to Tut visitors who return on a different day. According to Thomas, "We were really looking at making this a long-term experience rather than just 'Tut is here for five months. He will go away.' We're thinking of the long-term impact that it will have on the institution, and particularly on the visitor's perception. We want it to be a good experience and not just some flash-in-the-pan where we extract the maximum amount of dollars."

According to Cooney, the show has done a lot to raise the vis-

ibility of the institution within Los Angeles: "This has been very good, I think, to help people understand that this institution is huge and that it holds an extraordinary amount of wonderful art that people should come and see."

Los Angeles itself is also feeling the effects of this major tourism draw. Michael McDowell, senior director of cultural tourism for LA, Inc., the convention and visitors bureau, has been working on capturing the "short-flight/drive" market, that is, enticing visitors from Arizona and other parts of California. The bureau's study of recent LACMA blockbusters and the 1970s Tut phenomenon predicts good things for Tut 2. "We expect the show will generate \$147 million in the five months that it is here—and that's [including sales in] food and hotel rooms and other activities as well."

Other Tut destinations also have dollar signs in their eyes. Pennsylvania Gov. Edward Rendell has provided funds for the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia to market outside the region. To hopefully demonstrate the importance of such shows, the Franklin has commissioned an economic impact study for Tut. "Too many times you have decision makers look at the importance in terms of quality of life and not economic impact, not all the contributions a Tut [type of exhibit] would make to the city," said Dennis Wint, president and CEO, Franklin Institute.

In Fort Lauderdale, boat tours with a "Jewel of the Nile" theme are on the calendar, and all Broward County schoolchildren will study King Tut. "The visitors bureau has put all its muscle into the exhibit," said Lippman. "From the very beginning we said we wanted to make this a community-wide event. We're giving a whole new meaning to cultural tourism."

While Tut may prove a boon for its host museums and cities and prove to local governments that museums are an essential economic partner, large-scale traveling exhibitions still raise questions for the future. Will museums become increasingly involved with corporate partners, If so, what impact will that have on the content of exhibits, not to mention the museum's image in the community? Will directors and exhibit planners insist that large-scale exhibits appeal primarily to a mass-market audience? The answers lie in whether these shows continue to be a financial success.

"I guess it's hard to keep the doors open and maintain a high level of achievement and also maintain your purity of purpose," said Silver. "But there are limits. It is going to be an issue in the future, particularly if this show does well financially. Isn't the museum profession watching it to see if it will meet the huge financial expectations?" ■

Exhibit Schedule

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA): June 16-Nov. 15, 2005
 Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Dec. 15, 2005-April 23, 2006
 Field Museum, Chicago: May 26, 2006-Jan. 1, 2007
 Franklin Institute, Philadelphia: Feb. 3-Sept. 30, 2007

Top: Paolgett and Company, Jamie Paolgett, Chicago. Bottom, this page, and opposite: Kenneth Garrett, "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," Official Companion Book, © 2005 National Geographic Society.

Boy King: Wonder and Hype

Who was Tutankhamun, why is he so famous, and why does he draw so many visitors? Museum-goers in Los Angeles, Fort Lauderdale, Chicago, and Philadelphia can experience the rare treasures of King Tut and his relatives through "Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs," on tour through 2007. Expected to bring in millions of people and dollars, like the previous unprecedented blockbuster "The Treasures of Tutankhamun" (1976-1979), the current exhibition looks at ancient Egyptian civilization, its social and political hierarchy, and religious beliefs and rituals.

At its first venue at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, I joined the masses as they purchased tickets for "Tutankhamun," waited for timed entrances, and navigated the crowds. The museum was well equipped to accommodate hordes of people with temporary shelters; generic pharaoh figures that served as directional signage; convenient kiosks selling pretzels, salads, coffee, and beer; staff ready to corral people into lines and then a curtained room to watch a mandatory 90-second introductory film. This orientation, and every aspect leading up to and following it, stages the visit to be one of order and discipline. While these elements provide effective logistical solutions to handle crowds, they also can be among the greatest displeasures of the museum experience.

This particular experience requires attention and effort, and despite the corralling and shuttling, I did learn the basics: 1) King Tut ruled Egypt between the ages of 9 and 19. 2) He died mysteriously, the last bloodline heir to the 18th dynasty. 3) His father was probably Akhenaten, who was considered a heretic for focusing on a single god named Aten, represented as the sun disc. 4) Because of his erasure from official records (likely because of his relation to Akhenaten), King Tut's status was under the radar until the discovery of his tomb in 1922 by British archeologist Howard Carter. I registered these details only after visiting the exhibition twice, reading the catalogue, and listening to the audio tour narrated charmingly by native Egyptian actor Omar Sharif.

As much as the objects had to offer, the exhibition was distracting with dim and dramatic lighting, hard-to-read labels (both visually and conceptually), and most of all, a strict linear path that discourages backtracking into galleries already seen. For someone who needs ideas reinforced, especially with the immense content of the exhibition, I often felt frustrated and rushed and could not possibly dedicate to memory all the names and symbols familiar to Egyptology enthusiasts and doctorates. I was curious to know what my fellow visitors learned and hoped that they had been encouraged, like I was, to make visits to Egyptian art permanent collections, public libraries, and websites.

Mystery and wonder surround King Tut, as does hype, which often colors expectations and reactions. Some visitors expect large coffins and mounds of treasures, or have fond memories of the 1970s display of Tut's burial mask and a golden chariot, which they won't see this time. This exhibition offers 130 objects that paint a picture of Tut's complex and tumultuous times, which I doubt one could comprehensively make sense of in a single visit. "Tutankhamun" offers beauty, spectacle, and wonder, not to mention history, politics, culture, technology, and yes, crowds. As long as visitors can sustain their excitement with patience and energy and don't mind sharing tight spaces with strangers, then perhaps they will enjoy the mysteries of the boy king. ■

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Tutankhamun as the king of Upper Egypt in gilded wood.